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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: RUSSIA AND MD: AWAITING CONFIRMATION

Classified By: Political MC Susan M. Elliott for reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) Official Moscow took the news that the U.S. would "shelve" MD plans in the Czech Republic and Poland calmly, awaiting an official confirmation. Neither President Medvedev nor PM Putin have commented on the purported decision. Duma, defense, and commentators did not pass up the opportunity to crow about the supposed change in U.S. policy. Polish diplomats called us to express their disappointment and sought to remind us that the news broke on the seventieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland. End Summary.

The MFA

2. (C) Official Moscow was reserved in its response to the Wall Street Journal's overnight article quoting U.S. government sources to say that the U.S. would "shelve" missile defense (MD) plans for the Czech Republic and Poland. The MFA's press office said only, "we are waiting for official comments so that we could draw conclusions....It is primarily the question of statements by high-ranking members of the American administration." An unnamed MFA official would only go so far to tell Interfax that "if the United States really decides not to deploy missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic, that would be good news." (Note: So far neither President Medvedev nor PM Putin have commented on the purported decision. End Note.)

The State Duma and Ministry of Defense

3. (SBU) Outside of the MFA, officials and commentators were less reluctant to share their views. Chairman of the State Duma International Affairs Committee Konstantin Kosachyov was less reluctant, telling Russia's Vesti 24, "as far as I can judge, the Obama administration begins to understand us." Kosachev later added that "we never doubted the correctness of the facts Russia defended. On the one hand, a closer, more objective assessment of the situation in Iran, and, on the other hand, a more serious approach to the strategic dialogue between Russia and the U.S. as a major factor for global stability."

4. (SBU) President of the Geopolitical Issues Academy Colonel General Leonid Ivashov told Interfax that "U.S. missile sites in Poland and the Czech Republic were viewed as bargaining chips from the very start. Now they will ask for something in return....It is much more profitable for the United States to quit missile defense plans for Europe than to overcome the resistance and the inevitable negative effects on the bilateral relations with Russia."

Commentariat

15. (SBU) Influential Editor-in-Chief of the journal "Russia in Global Affairs," Fyodor Lukyanov told Ekho Moskvii radio that the decision to not build in the Czech Republic and Poland was "the expected decision of the U.S. administration."

16. (SBU) Retired Russian Strategic Rocket Forces Staff Colonel General Viktor Yeshin told Interfax that "the U.S. will not quit the strategic ABM idea. Even after the decision to deploy missile defense sites in the Czech Republic is made, missile sites will remain in Alaska and California." However, he dismissed the CONUS-based sites posed a threat to Russian security.

Polish Diplomats

17. (C) Polish diplomats called us repeatedly throughout the day for more information and to express their "extreme disappointment" with how the decision was leaked to the press. Calling the "announcement" a public relations "disaster," our Polish colleagues used the open line to remind us that September 17 was the seventieth anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland.
Beyrle